

**IDENTITY OF PLACE:  
AN EXAMINATION ON CAPTURING THE IDENTITY OF  
PLACE AND RESPONDING TO IT THROUGH ARCHITECTURE**

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**A Dissertation**

**Submitted to the Department of Architecture of the**

**University of Moratuwa in partial fulfilment of the**

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85444



University of Moratuwa

by

**H.G.B. SENANKA  
17-01-2004**



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## DECLARATION

I declare that this dissertation represents my own work, except where due acknowledgement is made, and that it has not been previously included in a thesis, dissertation or report submitted to this university or to any other institution for a degree, diploma or other qualification.

Signed:.....  
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## PREFACE

What is expected from the M.Sc. dissertation is for students to present an argument and then rationalise it by analytical thinking that is also backed by adequate research. The area of study is selected as one of importance to both the student and to the profession or the university for academic purposes.

Within this study the term place is used for the phenomena of place that is defined by many architects and academics as the basis for meaningful human habitation. Even within the place it can be identified from the personal room to house, to neighbourhoods, and cities or even one country as a distinct place. but this dissertation is considering the place in term of a place where a distinct character, and a unique that can be found. The case studies were selected to emphasise this boundaries of the place define by this dissertation. A city can hold several these kind of places.

But to study a response to a natural place a case study was selected that has responded to the natural setting of the place.



The response to the identity of place must address issue of capturing the identity of e place and for this an existing mechanism was selected as to capture the image this was illustrated in the part I of the chapter three together with the architectural response thus resulting in the framework for case studies.

The case studies were done based on this structure in two ways; from one point of view the place was analysed according to the analysis and capturing of the image of the place giving the place its identity. at this point all the identities are that are important are considered.. But the individualisation by verbalising and abstracting was not done in extent, from other point of view building was analysed as to how well the captured identity was reflected by the built-form. And the fusion of the two point of views will determine the success of the building.

# IDENTITY OF PLACE: AN EXAMINATION ON CAPTURING THE IDENTITY OF PLACE AND RESPONDING TO IT THROUGH ARCHITECTURE

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## Abstract

The place is what makes the human habitation meaningful. One's attachment to a place will provide the basis for identification to an existential foothold in the community.

The space is a prime consideration of architecture that gives the existential roots for people. There are different aspects and functions of spaces that can be categorised as unselfconscious and pragmatic space of the primitives, the self consciously experienced perceptual space of individual, the built space of architecture, and the abstract space of geometry.

The concept of "existential" or "lived space" is particularly important in this sense, for it seems specially relevant to phenomenological understanding of place. The place is created in concretising the existential space. This holds a strong relationship between the place and the space.

"in general it seems that space provides the context for places but derives its meaning from particular places" (Relph, E. 1976, p.2)

"A place is a space which has distinct character" (Norberg-Schulz, C, 1980, p.5)

The place is understood based on many concepts that involve place; sense of place, spirit of place, character of place and identity of place where each of these concepts is different yet are interrelated to each other. The identity of place pours out the essence of understanding the place in order to respond to place through architecture.

It is the identity of place that helps to distinguish a place as a unique entity with its own inherent attributes. Identity of place constitutes the static physical setting, observable activities and the meaning depicting the interrelation of the above two. It is the meaning that holds in minds of the people within the field of their position of inside or outside that help in understanding the identity of place. The image of the place, whether consensus, mass, individual or community will cast different identities that exist within a place. Any architectural intervention in a place can be executed to reduce, change or to respond to the existing identity of place.

If one were to respond to the identity of place first the identity of place must be captured. Capturing the identity of place can be done in an analytical way concluded in several steps starting from recording and analysing the existing situation, verbalising the identity and then abstracting it. The recording and analysing the existing place can be set down as a series of steps with an intellectual backing whereas the verbalising and the abstracting is determined by the ability and biases of the designer.

The captured identity is reflected through the built form in means of its expressions using appropriate scales, proportions, colours, textures, lighting conditions and maintaining the correct inside outside relationship. Architecture that responds to the identity of place is perceived as part of the place that does not destruct its inherent uniqueness but rather enhances and gives a sense of continuation.

# INTRODUCTION

## STUDY AREA

Many places are developing rapidly and many new buildings are emerging that does not response to the existing identity of that place. These unsuitable buildings are polluting the aesthetic and ambience of that particular place. The apparent importance of place, both functionally and existentially, has not been reflected in examinations of either the concept of place or of the nature of experience of place.<sup>1</sup>

There are two major reasons for attempting to understand the phenomenon of place. First, it is interesting in its own right as a fundamental expression of man's involvement in the world: and, second, improved knowledge of the nature of places and the creation of new places.<sup>2</sup> Different actions require different environments to take place in satisfaction. Therefore a town may consist of multitude of different places. This is an important fact to be taken into consideration of architects in designing.<sup>3</sup>

Kevin Lynch (1960,p.6) defines the identity of place simply as that which provided individuality or distinction from other places and serves as the basis for its recognitions a separable entity. This clearly indicates that each place has its own identity that is identifiable.

It is clear that rather than being an address or a point on a map the identity is a basic function of the experience of that place. What is involved in its experience is not merely the recognition of differences and of sameness between places- and also the much more fundamental act of identifying sameness and difference.

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<sup>1</sup> Relph, E. (1976) , Place & Placelessness , London,Pion Limited, p. 2

<sup>2</sup>ibid. , p. 44

<sup>3</sup> Norberg-Schulz, C (1980), *GENIUS LOCI, towards a phenomenology of Architecture* , New York ,Rizzoli International Publications Inc.p.5



## NEED FOR THE STUDY

The place reveals the mans external bonds to his surrounding environment. There are two major reasons for attempting to understand the phenomenon of place. First, it is interesting in its own right as a fundamental expression of man's involvement in the world: and, second, improved knowledge of the nature of places and the creation of new places.<sup>4</sup>

“ it is utterly part of our nature to want roots, to need roots, to struggle for roots, for a sense belonging, for some place that is recognised as mine, as yours, as ours. Nations, regions, states, countries, cities, towns – all of them have to do with politics and geography and history; but they are more than that, for they somehow reflect man's humanity, his need to stay someplace and get to know ... other people ... and what I suppose can be called a particular environment or space or neighbourhood or set of circumstances” (Robert Roles, 1970, pp.120-121)

this clearly shows that the importance of the place and to belong to a place as human beings. It is the identity of that place that keep up this sentimental bond with the place. Even though many aspects of the place changes with the time the identity remains as a static. If by human interventions the identity is lost the people attached to it will feel its loss. And yet the significance and the uniqueness of that place will be lost as well.

Therefore it is critical that new developments are done while retaining the original identity of the place. And proper understanding of how one should response to the identity of place through architecture must be thoroughly examined. In this sense this study will examine how to capture the identity and respond to it through architecture forming a part of many research and studies that must be done to overcome the critical need within the contemporary community.

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<sup>4</sup> Relph, E.(1976) , Place & Placelessness , London.Pion Limited, p. 44

## **INTENTION OF THE STUDY**

The intention of this study is to examine on how one can capture the identity of place as to respond to the identity of place through architecture. study will also examine architecture that has responded to the identity of place positively with the intension of establishing the fact that there is an inherent uniqueness of any place embedded in its identity where capturing it and reflecting it through architecture can retain its identity without destruction.

## **SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

The scope of the study is to examine on how one can capture the identity of place and respond to it through architecture. the study was limited to discussing the concept of identity of a place, and many other concepts related to place such as sense of place, character of place, spirit of place and image of place are beyond the scope of this study.

This was also limited to illustrating one method of capturing the identity even though existence of many methods resulted out of research work it is beyond the scope to discuss and examine all of these methods that prevails. The architectural expression of the identity of place were discussed under the selected framework in terms of plan, form, scale and proportions, colour, texture, lighting, detailing and responding to views. There will be other parameters to examine the expression but this was limited in discussing within the selected framework.

The case studies were selected within the Sri Lankan context but relevant examples that could be taken from printed materials out side Sri Lankan context were discussed. The socio-economic, political and cultural background of the country framed these case studies selected further limiting the study.

## **METHOD OF THE STUDY**

The study was carried out according to a case study based study method. For that a proper framework was created within the part I of Chapter three.

During the first phase a literature survey was done in order to understand the concepts that are related to phenomenon of place and the next phase included more research work in order to recognise the existing systems of capturing and responding to the identity of the place.

During the last phase case studies were carried out as to establish the identified system of capturing the identity and responding to the identity of place.

